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Sir Roger Casement on the Ottomans and Armenians in Britain's Great War

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Abstract:

The paper explores the reasons why Sir Roger Casement, the internationally famous humanitarian and future central figure in the 1916 Rising, took the hostile attitude he did to the Armenian cause and why he regarded the presentation of the events of 1915 merely as war propaganda. Casement was a complex character and not just a simple nationalist opposing British policy in the world from an Irish Republican position. It is argued that whilst Casement's transition from servant of Empire to Irish Republican anti-imperialist had an undoubted effect on his political stance, it was Casement's view of the Great War, in representing the moral collapse of Liberalism, that most fundamentally determined his attitude to the Armenians and how he viewed the events of 1915.

Keywords: Armenians, Great War, Liberalism, Ottomans, Roger Casement

Why did Sir Roger Casement, one of the most famous and influential humanitarians of his time take such a hostile attitude to the Armenian cause and why did he regard the presentation of the events of 1915 in Anatolia as bogus?

Casement has recently been described as one of the “precursors of the jurist Raphael Lemkin who helped to set the stage for his major legal achievement, the 1948 international proscription of genocide”. According to this view, Casement played a key role “in the birth of modern human rights law and activism by helping to guide their development [...] toward a twentieth century consensus that mass death is unacceptable anywhere and that organized intervention is required to bring it to an end and hold those responsible to account” (see Kiernan 2011, 43).

Yet, just as Lemkin has been associated with the campaign to recognize an Armenian Genocide, Casement, at the time, the most substantial activist in humanitarianism, took a diametrically opposed view of the question, denying the validity of the atrocity allegations.

To understand Sir Roger Casement's view of the Armenians and Ottomans it is important to consider his world view. It should first be noted that Casement was a complex character. He was from a Protestant Anglo-Irish background and had been an honoured servant of the British Empire with a family tradition of service to the Imperial State. However, Roger's father had briefly joined the Hungarian Patriot rising against Hapsburg rule and had a sympathy for small nations (*ibidem*, 30). Casement had served under Sir Edward Grey as an employee of the Foreign Office and was on personal terms with his superior, with whom he had worked closely. Casement had performed extensive intelligence work for the British State in various parts of Africa and suggested and initiated military operations in the British war on the Boers¹. He had developed an English Liberal world-view prior to his Irish nationalist development and there is no evidence that he ever abandoned it. In many respects he had a similar social and political background to Lord Bryce, the notable campaigner for Armenia, in his Liberalism with Ulster connections. Casement had, therefore, all the aspects of a background that should have made him an advocate of the Armenian cause and an anti-Turk in the Gladstonian "bag and baggage" tradition, like Bryce.

However, Casement not only opposed the mainstream Liberal view on the Ottomans and Armenians but also reserved his greatest hostility for his former Liberal colleagues, Edward Grey and James Bryce. It is a hostility that can only be accounted for within the context of Casement's view that Liberal principles had been fundamentally betrayed in the launching of the Great War on Germany. This position of Casement's also separated Sir Roger from mainstream Irish nationalists whom he viewed as having gone over to Imperialism in their quest for Irish Home Rule from the Liberal Party².

In the second decade of the 20th Century Casement developed from being an Irish Home Ruler into a revolutionary Irish Republican and anti-Imperialist. However, an explanation of his position in relation to the Ottomans and Armenians and the events of 1915 is only partially revealed by this particular transition, which has a more evolutionary character than his reaction to British Foreign Policy. What is really fundamental in the development of Casement's position is his disillusionment, as an advanced and principled Liberal, with the Foreign Policy of his former superiors in the Liberal Government, which he came to believe, was orientated toward provoking a war on Germany for commercial purposes. Having predicted this course of events prior to hostilities Casement then saw what he took to be the moral collapse of English Liberalism in the support it gave to the Great War on Germany and the Ottomans from August 1914.

¹ See Mitchell 2013, 65-75, for further information.

² See Walsh 2003, for the development of relations between the British Liberal Party and Redmond's Parliamentary Party.

Casement's writings on British Foreign Policy and the Great War have long been available in various published forms, particularly in *The Crime Against Europe* collection (see Casement 1915). However, only recently have his further writings contained in the Berlin publication, *The Continental Times*, become known. These, often written under pseudonyms, contain his hitherto undiscovered thoughts on the political situation in Europe and the wider world from 1914 to his departure from Germany in 1916 to take part in the Rising. They supplement his *The Crime Against Europe* collection and shed much greater light on Casement's view of Britain's Great War on the Ottoman Empire.

Casement's published writings, along with his Berlin Diaries (see Mitchell 2016), reveal why he took the attitude he did to Britain's Great War, including why he went into alliance with Germany, and how this led him to take the position he did in relation to the Armenians and events of 1915.

1. *Casement on the Events of 1915*

Sir Roger Casement wrote in *The Continental Times* in October 1915:

A fresh 'Armenian Massacre' having been deftly provoked by a conspiracy engineered from the British Embassy at Constantinople, whereby English arms, money and uniforms, were to be furnished to the Armenians on condition that they rose against the Turkish Government, England now turns to the humanitarian impulse of the American people to secure a fresh sword against Turkey. America is being stirred with tales of horror against the Turks – with appeals to American manhood on behalf of a tortured and outraged people. The plan was born in the (British) Foreign Office; and the agency for carrying through the conspiracy against Turkish sovereignty in Armenia was Sir Louis Mallet, the late British Ambassador at Constantinople. (*The Continental Times*, 18 October 1915)

Casement, the great humanitarian and Honoured exposé of genocidal behaviour of "gallant, little Belgium" against African natives in the Congo and abuses of the rubber plantation workers in South America, was, therefore, dismissive of the claims of massacres of Armenians that began appearing in Britain in 1915. During the summer of 1915 British and U.S. newspapers had begun to report Turkish and Kurdish massacres of Armenians. Claims of up to half a million deaths appeared even at this stage. It was in response to these reports that Casement wrote his condemnation of Britain and Ambassador Mallet for what was happening to the Armenians.

Casement probably did not have firm evidence that substantial amounts of weaponry³ had begun to be filtered through to Armenian revolutionary

³ See McMeekin 2011, 145–156, for information about Tsarist military collaboration with Armenian revolutionary groups.

groups in Ottoman territory from the time of the British/Russian understanding of 1907, but he would have suspected it on the basis of his understanding of how the British State worked in these matters. In one of Casement's articles for *The Continental Times*, "England's Care for the Truth", Sir Roger uses the subtitle: "By One Who Knows Both" (*The Continental Times*, 30 July 1915).

The 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement, which partitioned Persia/Iran into spheres of influence among the two Powers, along with settling of other outstanding disputes in Asia, had been presented to the public as merely an accommodation between England and Russia in the so-called "Great Game" of Imperial rivalry.

Casement's writings in *The Continental Times* show that he suspected that the 1907 agreement was actually not an end in itself, but a rapprochement aimed at securing an informal alliance against a new Balance of Power enemy for Britain on the European continent – Germany. Britain was increasingly viewing Germany as the rising power in Europe, particularly in the commercial and naval spheres and its traditional Balance of Power policy determined that alliance be made with other powers to curtail or ultimately destroy the German development⁴. Therefore, arrangements were made with the two main former rivals, France and Russia, to settle disputes and re-orientate these Powers toward conflict with Germany. Planning was made through the newly established Committee of Imperial Defence as well as through military conversations by the respective staffs and Royal Navy intelligence to put into operation a war plan designed for a suitable occasion⁵. From 1911 Casement began writing about the direction of British Foreign Policy that was inevitably going to result in a world war.

The British/Russian agreement was meant on the British side to prepare the ground for the *Russian Steamroller* – the large armies that it was believed the Tsar could field, given the great Russian population – to be employed against Germany in a future war. It was part of the necessary encirclement of Germany, closing a large land area that Royal Navy Blockade was incapable of closing. Britain was fundamentally a Naval Power and did not have the military forces necessary to surround or defeat Germany on its own. It could contribute an Expeditionary Force of around 120,000 for the Western Flank, to be aligned with the French ally but Britain needed the manpower resources of the French and Russian armies to make any conflict with Germany effective.

The process of British/Russian alliance against Germany culminated in the secret Constantinople Agreement of 1915 in which the Tsar was rewarded

⁴ Casement puts forward the editorial of *The Times* of 8 March 1915 as proof of this in *The Continental Times*, 9 April 1915.

⁵ A number of publications deal with these developments but particularly see Hankey 1961. A review of the work of the CID is contained in Walsh 2016.

for the lend of his army and the keeping of it in the field against Germany, with his heart's desire – Constantinople/Istanbul. From this date onwards (1907) the Russians prepared the Armenian revolutionaries as a fifth column supporting the future invasion of Ottoman territories, now permissible with England as an ally rather than an enemy which had previously blocked its advance (the traditional British Foreign Policy toward the Tsar having been expressed in the famous music hall chorus: "The Russians Shall Not Have Constantinople!")⁶.

British Ambassador to Constantinople, Louis du Pan Mallet had a difficult role to play at the Porte. British Policy toward Istanbul was in a state of flux since 1907. The British State and English private companies were contributing to the defence of the Ottoman capital whilst making surveys of the defences. Britain was engaged in a naval alliance with the Ottomans and had contracts and control of the supply of ships to the Turks. Casement knew Ambassador Mallet personally and there was a series of correspondence between the two men a few years before the Great War. Ambassador Mallet mysteriously went "on leave" during a most crucial time in the summer of 1914. This was the July/August period in which it was understood in England that the Germans would desperately seek out the Ottomans as allies to break their isolation in the face of the Triple Entente. It was known that Enver Pasha had concluded that the Ottoman policy of neutrality would ultimately prove impossible with the Imperialist forces in alliance and on war footings. A defensive alliance was a distinct possibility. The question was: Did Britain want to go to war with the Ottomans as well as the Germans?

The British constructed a diplomatic record to serve the purpose of what their real objective was in relation to the Ottoman Empire. That record demanded Germany and the Ottomans be placed in the wrong. Provocations, which in themselves were causes of war, were made on the Turks, such as the seizing of their battleships being paid for by popular subscription, in British shipyards. Churchill also blockaded the Straits, cutting Istanbul off from the Mediterranean. And there was the shepherding of the Goeben and Breslau battleships into the Straits by the Royal Navy which helped compromise Turkish neutrality.

Ambassador Mallet was allowed to leave his post at this most crucial time, when prominent people, in England were decrying the fact that Britain, friend of the Young Turks, was losing them as allies because of atrocious diplomacy. He was not there during Churchill's breaking of the naval alliance and returned to Istanbul only a month after the British Declaration of War on Germany, when all the important events had occurred that sealed the fate of the Ottomans. Upon Mallet's return to his post he reported to

⁶ See Walsh 2009, 41-89. Also see Walsh 2017, 193-205.

Edward Grey that there was “a renewal of the insurrectionary activities of the non-Turkish races”, which would precipitate Russian invasion in the East. It appears that Ambassador Mallet’s role was to keep Turkey sweet – and neutral – until it suited Britain to wage War on the Ottomans. He advised the Russians on September 3rd, two months before the British Declaration of War on the Ottomans, not “to raise the question of the partition of Turkey at the present time” (qtd. in Uyanik 2016, 20).

There is no escaping the geopolitical logic of the situation: that war had to be waged on the Ottomans for the Tsar to believe he could acquire Constantinople and in order to keep his armies in the field of battle against Germany.

It is unsurprising that Casement, knowing all that he did about the inner workings of British diplomacy, took Ambassador Mallet to be a conspirator in the destruction of Ottoman Turkey and a collaborator with the Armenian revolutionaries, who were being armed and organised by the Tsar. Casement believed that Mallet could not possibly have been above all that was happening in the background unless he was a complete innocent with regard to Foreign Office policy. What was probably most likely was that the Ambassador, who was tremendously popular with the Porte, was allowed to cultivate a friendship with the Ottomans as a decent English gentleman who knew nothing of the turn in British policy against the Turks.

2. *British Policy and the Ottomans*

Sir Roger Casement was an insider who predicted the direction of British Foreign Policy and where it was leading and who proved correct in his estimation. From 1906 he began discouraging Irish recruiting to the British Army whilst still working for the Imperial State.

In 1915 Casement penned “The Sickman – A Fable That Cost Dear” for *The Continental Times* under one of his favoured pseudonyms “X of X”. It was published in the edition of 6 September. This article marked the Allied assault at Gallipoli and emphasised Casement’s view that it would prove disastrous for Britain. In the article Casement argued that the so-called “Sick man of Europe” – the Ottoman Empire – had chosen a German Doctor to revive its health when the Imperialist Powers had gathered around its bedside awaiting the handing over of the keys to the kingdom to them, so they could take over the Ottoman territories. For this reason, Turkey was marked down as an enemy along with Germany of the Triple *Entente*. Casement suggested that “it was agreed that two of the friends should attack the house by the front door, and another friend, whom they could see but afar off, by reason that the Sickman’s house and garden stood between them, should assail it by the back door”. So whilst England and France attacked the Ottomans from the Dardanelles and Mesopotamia, Russia invaded from the Caucasus.

Writing in *The Continental Times* under the pen-name “Dr. John Quincy Emerson” Casement pointed to Britain’s breaking of the Cyprus Convention of 1878, concluded between Lord Salisbury and the Ottoman Sultan, as an example of Britain’s bad faith:

England pledged her national word and ‘to defend the Asiatic dominions of the Sultan’ from Russian attack, and in return for this guarantee, the island of Cyprus was to be ‘occupied’ by her, Turkish sovereignty remaining legally intact, so that a *point of d’appui* for the defence of Asia Minor might be in the hands of the defending power.

In 1914 Russia declared war upon Turkey and the Asiatic dominions of the Sultan are invaded. England, although she was under no treaty obligation to Russia or bound by any agreement to that Power, her hands being ‘perfectly free’, as Sir Edward Grey assures Parliament repeatedly, and although she was bound to violate her treaty with Turkey and commits a double act of national dishonour.

She not only does not fulfil her promise to defend the invaded region she has taken under her protection, but she seizes the very gage entrusted to her keeping to assure the fulfilment of that promise and she co-operates with the invader by herself assailing the Asiatic dominions of the Sultan. She annexes Cyprus and joins Russia in the assault on Asia Minor.

So much for the sanctity of treaties when British interests call for their violation [...]. (“Still Further North”, *The Continental Times*, 22 October 1915)

The alteration in British Foreign Policy was first drawn attention to by W.T. Stead, the Gladstonian Liberal and famous journalist, who later perished on the Titanic. Stead, a fearsome anti-Turk (in his own words), noted at the time of the Balkan Wars that Sir Edward Grey was, unlike his predecessors, refusing to uphold the “Public Law of Europe” i.e. international law and treaties (see Stead 1911, 11-17). Although Stead had campaigned over the decades for an understanding between England and Russia that would preserve the peace, he began to suspect that the Anglo-Russian agreement concluded by Grey in 1907 was more than it seemed. It was not just a treaty of peace, which carved up Persia among other things, but was having a destabilising influence on the Balkans and further East.

Casement was, in many ways, in the same Gladstonian mould as Stead, suspicious of Liberal Imperialist Foreign Policy as a departure from the principles of Liberalism. He was, furthermore, keen to point out that while the Liberal Government had rallied its reluctant backbenchers around the Great War on Germany on the basis of treaty breaking by the Germans in relation to the neutrality of Belgium, it was quite prepared itself to ignore treaty obligations in relation to the Ottomans.

The Continental Times’s article “Sir Roger Casement on Sir Edward Grey” outlined Sir Roger’s theory of where Liberalism had gone wrong. With regard to Grey:

[...] for ten years, under the guise of a Liberal statesman, he has been used as a shield between the Foreign Office and all Liberal criticisms of its policy; the shield behind which, with a nominally democratic government in power the permanent plotters against German unity and expansion might develop their attack unseen, unchecked and uncontrolled by the forces that were supposedly the masters of English public action. The ten years of 'Liberalism' at the Foreign Office since 1905, under the nominal direction of a Liberal Minister, will go down in history as the most criminal, the most audacious and, I believe, in the end the most disastrous in all English history.

The war against Germany was decreed years ago by those powers that own the Foreign Office and drive, not guide, the English people, and the personality of the Foreign Minister had as little to do with the result achieved as the personal character of an Archbishop of Canterbury has to do with the policy of the Church of England.

Sir Edward Grey was by constitution, temperament and lack of training, no less than the absence of the special qualities needed, unfit for the post the exigencies of political party life placed him in charge of, on the return of the Liberals to office, after ten years of exclusion from power in December 1905. (*The Continental Times*, 18 October 1918)

Casement's tendency to see Sir Edward as a "docile and obedient tool" of darker forces in the British State is perhaps, wishful thinking, given Grey's knowledge of, and active participation in, many of the actions which led to Britain's Foreign Policy reorientation and war planning for what actually occurred in August 1914. However, Casement also argued that it was the Liberal's retreat from Gladstone's Home Rule initiative for Ireland that sowed the seeds of the success of the Foreign Policy that created the Great War.

Casement's argument was that British Unionist opposition to Irish Home Rule from 1886 had led to the development of the Liberal Imperialist tendency within the Liberal Party, which Grey, along with Asquith, Haldane and Churchill represented and which had come to dominance in the party. Open discussion of Foreign Policy had been suppressed by the leadership, along with the Gladstonian pledge to Ireland, in the interests of returning to power after the Chamberline split and long period of Conservative/Unionist rule. Foreign Policy had been removed from the party-political stage and become confined to the secret diplomacy and activities of a reactionary elite in the Foreign Office who were bent on war with Germany. They had insisted on the continuity of policy from the Unionist Government to the new Liberal Government of 1906. Sir Edward Grey was their favoured appointee and had been anointed Foreign Minister in a type of coronation in order to keep the control of foreign policy away from the dangerous Gladstonian Liberals.

The betrayal of Liberal principles Casement felt with regard to the British Foreign Policy he believed had caused the Great War led him to assemble the collection of essays for publication, *The Crime Against Europe*. This

collection was supplemented by his writings for *The Continental Bulletin* of Berlin in which Casement argues his case for viewing the World War as having been made in England in order to cut down a potential rival in the long tradition of Balance of Power. He described the alliance between Liberal England, France, its age-old enemy, and authoritarian, Tsarist Russia as an unnatural one aimed at securing British mastery of the Seas.

In is in the context of Casement's view of the Great War as an unnecessary catastrophe imposed on Europe and the wider world that his view of the Ottomans and Armenians must be understood.

3. Casement and James Bryce

After Sir Edward Grey, the chief object of Casement's animosity became Lord James Bryce, who had by this time become a central figure in the Liberal Imperialist intelligentsia and who was working in an official capacity in British Government information.

Bryce was a long-standing friend of the Armenian cause. He wrote *Transcaucasia and Ararat* in 1877, a travel book that had over one hundred pages of political reflections within it that were supportive of the Armenians and strongly anti-Ottoman. It was published at the time of the "Bulgarian Horrors" a substantial campaign in Gladstonian Liberalism against alleged Ottoman atrocities in the Balkans of which Bryce was part. In his writings Bryce presented a picture of the Armenians as a Christian people struggling valiantly against Ottoman oppression. He contrasted the civilized Armenians to the barbaric Turks, identifying the Armenian community as being destined for something greater, although lacking in nationalism and being a small minority in a Muslim region. A new expanded edition was published in 1898 after the Dasknaks had emerged, Armenian risings had occurred against the Ottomans and strong countermeasures had been taken against them.

Bryce's work was part of Liberal England's patronising of the Armenians in the late Nineteenth Century. The general thrust of this narrative was that the Armenians were a special people among the largely Muslim Ottoman subjects who were destined to become a nation, like the Balkan Christian nations who were rising against the Ottomans. The problem, however, was that there was little actual basis for nationhood among the Armenians due to their numerical weakness along with internal and geographical division. There was also no prospect that they could produce and sustain a state among the hostile conditions without the intervention of the Great Powers. Since Russia was the most likely of these Powers who could actively aid the Armenians and the Tsar was Britain's main strategic opponent in the region there was little hope for the Armenians. The future Lord George Curzon had condemned pro-Armenian sentiment in England as "fatal philanthropy" and Lord Salisbury had stated

that they should not rely on Britain to intervene on their behalf because the Royal Navy was incapable of traversing the Taurus Mountains. Of course, the 1907 agreement between England and Russia radically altered this situation.

Lord Bryce's most famous intervention on behalf of the Armenians was his famous 1916 "Blue Book" (Bryce 2000). However, prior to the issuing of the Blue Book on the alleged Ottoman atrocities against the Armenians, Bryce had issued an earlier report aimed at the Germans which attracted Casement's attentions.

In late 1914 Prime Minister Asquith chose Lord Bryce to investigate allegations of German atrocities in Belgium. In the Spring of 1915 Bryce issued his *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages* on behalf of the British Government committee he headed.

In "The Far-Extended Baleful Power of the Lie", an article Casement had published in *The Continental Times* of 3 November 1915, the Irishman made a vigorous attack on the British Government and James Bryce, in particular. The idea of "Belgian atrocities" struck Casement as ironic since King Leopold and the Belgian Imperialists had been the prime exponents of atrocities that the Irishman had investigated (and been honoured for). The war-time British and Redmondite propaganda depicting Belgium as "Poor Little Belgium" would have not impressed Casement.

Casement suspected that his earlier reports of Belgian atrocities in the Congo whilst acknowledged, had been stored by the British Government for future leverage over the Belgian Government and employed in preventing the Belgians consenting to a German traverse of their territory, when war came. Because Casement believed Britain was intent on war on Germany for the best part of a decade he could see the value of his work for the British State. That made Casement think about the relationship between humanitarianism and *realpolitik* and how atrocity accounts could be used for political purposes without regard for the victims or its original formal humanitarian intention.

Casement had first met James Bryce at Delagoa Bay in 1895 when Roger was British Consul for Portuguese East Africa. Casement's appointment to Delagoa Bay showed how trusted he was by the British Foreign Office, which he served for seventeen years. With a British war on the Boers seen as inevitable Lourenco Marques, where Casement was located, became a place of great significance, one of the few ports outside of British territory through which arms and ammunition could be supplied for Boer defence arrangements. Casement's job was to keep an eye on what was moving from whom to whom and where to where for Britain. He received communications here from Joseph Chamberlain the Colonial Secretary, who was known to favour annexation of the Transvaal. Casement remained there until July 1898 before being transferred to West Africa, and then the Congo, where he made his fame as a humanitarian exposé of atrocities.

When Casement was returning from his second voyage up the Amazon in 1911 to investigate atrocities he was invited by James Bryce, who was at that time British Ambassador to Washington, to meet President Taft. Bryce cooperated with Casement to persuade the US State Department of its duty to protect the indigenous workers from abuses on the American continent (see Mitchell 2015).

In comparing his own work in that field with Lord Bryce's Casement suggested that "In my case they were investigated on the spot at some little pains and danger to myself. In Lord Bryce's case they were not encountered upon earth but fell, as it were from heaven, and had to be inspected with a very long telescope" (*The Continental Times*, 3 November 1915).

In June 1903, as British Consul to the Congo, Casement had made a four-month journey into the African interior to investigate atrocities. He informed Sir Edward Grey that he had "broken into the thieves kitchen" and described himself as a self-appointed "Criminal Investigation Department". From these dangerous on the spot investigations he had produced his 61-page printed report that became famous across Europe⁷. Casement estimated that as many as 3 million natives had died of disease, torture or shooting in 15 years. However, he was determined to collect as much evidence as possible to justify his claims. In the Amazon, Casement collected first-hand evidence of atrocities such as mass executions, maiming and barbarous treatment against natives on the ground (see Gilbert 2003, 12). Lord Bryce had nothing of the experience Casement gained in his singular energetic pursuance of evidence and it is unsurprising that Sir Roger viewed him as an imposter in relation to the authentic article.

James Bryce, historian of the Holy Roman Empire and academic, had been in Gladstone's last cabinet, had been appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland by the incoming Liberal Government of 1906. Although a Home Ruler, Bryce had failed to have the courage of his convictions and Home Rule for Ireland was left on the shelf the Unionist governments of the previous decades had placed it. Casement had met him on a number of occasions during this period. Bryce was then appointed British Ambassador in Washington where Casement met him again in connection with interesting the U.S. Government in the atrocities he had encountered in the Amazon. Bryce was a great success as Ambassador and was given a peerage as a result of his services. He was the perfect appointment, therefore, later in promoting a report on German atrocities in Belgium on behalf of the British Government which was mainly aimed at influencing opinion in America.

Casement and Lord Bryce were both Ulster Protestants of sorts (Casement was born in Dublin but raised in North Antrim whilst Bryce was more

⁷ See Kiernan 2011 for more information on this aspect.

an Englishman born in Belfast). But whilst Casement was the general article with regard to active humanitarianism, getting his hands dirty on the scene of atrocities and reporting on them, he considered Bryce to be an academic *poseur*. Casement wrote in *The Continental Times* of 3 November 1915:

I have investigated more *bona fide* atrocities at close hand than possibly any other living man. But unlike Lord Bryce, I investigated them on the spot, from the lips of those who had suffered, in the very place where the crimes were perpetuated, where the evidence could be sifted and the accusation brought by the victim could be rebutted by the accused; and in each case my finding was confirmed by the Courts of Justice of the very States whose citizens I had indicted.

Casement considered Bryce's enquiry into German atrocities in Belgium as a purely Government propagandist exercise established to blacken the name of the enemy with its printing presses prepared to publish a foregone conclusion. As for Bryce, Casement suggested that "it is not the jurist, not the scholar, not the historian who speaks" but "a hireling". It was "only necessary to turn to James Bryce the historian, to convict Lord Bryce, the partisan". Casement concluded:

Lord Bryce's name will be associated not with that Holy Roman Empire he sought to recall by scholarly research, but with that unholy Empire he sought to sustain in the greatest of its crimes by lending the weight of a great name, and prostituting great attainments to an official campaign of slander, defamation and calumny conducted on a scale unparalleled in any war between civilized nations during the last three centuries.

Casement described the work Bryce was doing, in describing German and Turkish atrocities on behalf of the British War effort, as both duplicitous and fraudulent. Casement believed that Britain was engaged in intentionally creating the conditions within which atrocities were bound to occur and then using them cynically as moral weapons against the enemy. Casement viewed Lord Bryce and others engaged in such a process as having departed from their former standards of objectivity and having become mere propagandists. Unlike Casement, they had abandoned their anti-war Liberal principles and become mere hirelings of their state, right or wrong. As such, their work could no longer be relied upon as truthful.

It was clear to Casement that in all this the Armenians did not matter one jot. They were only useful to Britain as cannon-fodder and atrocity-fodder. The more they suffered and died the better for the War effort, despite the efforts of those who pleaded their cause from a moral viewpoint.

Casement, of course, could not comment on Lord Bryce's *Report of The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire* published in October 1916 (Bryce 2000). On 3 August of that year Casement had been executed for Treason by the British.

Angus Mitchell has recently written:

Later historians have recognized that the Bryce investigation raises awkward questions about the unsettling intersections between history and propaganda. In the war of words that conflicts inevitably produce, his report made a crucial contribution both to justifying entry into the war and to persuading the rest of the world of the righteousness of that intervention [...] Occupying the moral high ground is a vital step in the assertion and maintenance of victory. (Mitchell 2015, 38)

4. Armenians as an Imperial Instrument

The basis of Casement's hostility to the Armenian narrative produced in Britain lies in his view of the Armenians being used as an instrument of British Imperialism with regard to the war of destruction and conquest being waged on the Ottoman Empire. It should be stated that Casement had no animosity to the Armenians as a people and never wrote about whether their grievances against the Ottoman were valid or otherwise. He did not offer a view as to their claims for a national entity although he presumably would have opposed the idea of a "Magna Armenia", as supported by other Gladstonian Liberals and Irish nationalists such as T.P. O'Connor.

Casement's writings suggest that he was unhappy at the singling out of certain sections of humanity as having a monopoly of suffering. He could not conceive of what was happening in Anatolia as a completely one-sided affair and would have valued the loss of Muslim life as equally as Christian, unlike the English Liberal narrative.

Casement saw the Armenians in a similar light to the Greeks: in being, in his opinion, cynically used for the British interest and inevitably being let down in a manner that would prove catastrophic for them in the longer term.

Casement believed the Armenians were to be employed as pawns in the British game of destroying the Ottoman Empire through the promotion of Insurrection in the territories of enemy states. According to Sir Roger, the Turks were to be encouraged or provoked into arranging an "Armenian Massacre" to provide moral cover for the British Imperialist land grab of Palestine and Mesopotamia. That would tug at the heart strings of the English Liberals of the Gladstonian tradition and make them good war-propagandists. Arnold Toynbee and Lord Bryce were central to this aspect in Casement's view. Sir Roger predicted that the Armenians themselves were expendable for the British State, in all senses.

Undoubtedly, Casement was to prove as accurate in his depiction of the Armenians as mere pawns of the Great Powers in the Great War as he was with regard to the Greeks⁸.

⁸ See the article "A Pacific Blockade", published by Casement under the pseudonym Diplomaticus, in *The Continental Times*, 13 December 1915, for a good summary of Casement's view of Britain's use of the Greeks in the Great War.

Akaby Nassibian, the Armenian writer, concedes that "Armenia", the nation was largely dependent upon British Imperialism and was not a going concern without it. But Britain encouraged and then let down the Armenians, as Casement predicted it would in 1915:

Britain's interest in Armenian territory far outweighed her concern for the Armenian people [...] The war radically changed the direction of Britain's interest in Armenia. As she was opposed to Turkey, she did not care about Ottoman integrity any longer. She was prepared to satisfy the territorial desiderata of her allies, Russia and France, over Armenia. Moreover, having secured by arms and agreements the certainty of her predominance over the Persian Gulf, she lost almost all interest in Armenian territory. The war, however, brought a drastic increase of interest in the Armenian people. Britain had to use all her material and moral forces to win the war. So she used the Armenian holocausts of 1915 to discredit her enemies [...] in order to wean American sympathy from the Central Powers, to show to her Moslem subjects the nature of the Turkish government they were being urged to fight, and in order to stimulate the war effort at home by indicating that the conflict was against cruelty, oppression and injustice. Britain also made use of Armenian manpower [...] to reinforce that disintegrating front after 1917. But in order to stimulate the Armenians Britain had to 'pledge' herself to the liberation of Armenia, an expression that was also used to counter the charges of the pacifists at home that the war was being fought for greed [...] At the end of the war [...] Britain was in the position of having made [...] the provision of a 'National Home' for the Armenians, one of the most 'loudly advertised' of her war aims [...] the public statements and the Treaty of Sevres given to vindicate these statements, again aroused hopes among the Armenians [...] and laid Armenia yet again open to the hostility of Turkey and now also to that of the other Caucasian states. The Treaty of Sevres, unaccompanied by real help, exposed Armenia to reprisals and in the end proved to be her doom [...]. (Nassibian 1985, 267-269)

Casement understood that the Great War was waged by Britain primarily for strategic and Balance of Power purposes and the moral gloss put on it by those Liberals who salved their consciences by presenting it as a moral war were deluding themselves and others. The substance of the British State which Casement had encountered in his work for it, and which planned the War to destroy the rising Germany and incorporate Ottoman territories in the British Empire, was not going to organise the Peace after it had won the War on moral terms. The logical result was that the Armenians would be encouraged into battle through the moral support they received from Liberal England and then would be discarded when the real substance of the British State, through its permanent military/political elite concluded settlements on the basis of power politics. In this Casement was undoubtedly proved correct. Arthur Balfour, then British Foreign Minister, tasked with offloading the Armenian problem to the Americans and washing England's hands of them suddenly "discovered" that the principles of "self-determination"

worked against the Armenian cause because they did not actually constitute a majority in the area they claimed for an Armenian state⁹.

Along with that, although Britain appeared to have secured its global dominance by winning the Great War against Germany it had, as Casement also predicted, severely weakened itself in the process. It had had to enlist the power of the United States to complete its victory and had become financially dependent upon it. While Britain attempted to pass off the Armenian problem to President Wilson it proved incapable of dealing with the Turkish resurgence organised by Mustapha Kemal and had to overturn its treaty with the Ottomans and concede a more generous settlement to the Turkish Republic at Lausanne. There was no place for an Armenian state on Ottoman territory within it.

Casement was a consistent Liberal who was appalled at the great departure from principle that led to the catastrophe of the Great War. He saw what he described as moral hypocrisy from his former colleagues in Liberal England, stood his ground and chose sides with Germany, Ottoman Turkey and the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

The division in attitude toward the Armenians and Ottomans tends to run through Irish nationalism separating the Redmondite/Home Rule, Irish Parliamentary Party from the Republican anti-imperialist revolutionaries. The Redmondites contained a number of strong supporters of the Armenian cause, most notably T.P. O'Connor, who spoke on many platforms for the Armenians, including alongside General Antranik¹⁰. The mainstream Nationalist press like the *Freeman's Journal*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish News* of Belfast were strongly supportive of the Armenian cause and virulently anti-Turk. All also exhibited a strong Christian antipathy to the Muslim world with frequent reference to the typical prevalent stereotypes of the time.

The main exception to this in Ireland was the popular religious periodical *The Catholic Bulletin* which had a Sinn Fein orientation from 1916 and an Anti-Treaty position from 1922. This publication, which was edited by J.J. O'Kelly, took Casement's position and was generally supportive of Turkish nationalism, Mustapha Kemal and dismissive of the general narrative advanced with regard to the Armenians by the pro-Imperialist press in Britain and Ireland¹¹. One of the nations that the revolutionary Sinn Fein government of 1919-21 addressed its "Message to the Free Nations of the World" to,

⁹ See Gaillard 1921, 297-299, for dealings between Balfour and the U.S. diplomatic negotiators over Armenia during the 1920-1921 period.

¹⁰ See Buxton 1919, for the text of O'Connor's speech at Central Hall, Westminster with Lord Bryce and General Andranik on 19 June 1919.

¹¹ See Walsh 2009, 413-530 for extensive extracts from the Irish press during the period.

and attempted to establish diplomatic relations with, was Mustapha Kemal's revolutionary government in Ankara¹².

Roger Casement was not simply an Irish Nationalist availing of England's difficulty, or a hater of Britain and its Allies. He was actually a principled British Liberal standing up for the historic principles which he saw as being abandoned in the moral collapse of Liberalism in August 1914. And that is why he took the attitude he did to the Armenians, wrote what he did, and finally, did what he did at Easter 1916.

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¹² See *Dail Eireann Debates* 1-21, January 1919 and *Irish Department of Foreign Affairs* 104, NAI DE 4/4/2, 10 August 1921.

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